

# ETERNITY AND FREEDOM

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“I searched myself.” Heraclitus

## PREFACE

When, thanks to Dr. Geoffrey Klempner, editor-in-chief of Philosophy Pathways, I was given the opportunity to edit Issue No.206 (which came out on 16th November 2016), I wrote three pieces especially for that Issue in which I tried to give a synopsis of the philosophy I grappled with ever since I was a boy. I wrote in the Editor’s Prefatory Note:

“Honestly, I do not feel like apologizing for my egotism in taking up the whole of this Philosophy Pathways Issue for myself. I wanted to take the opportunity generously afforded me by Dr. Geoffrey Klempner to present a summing up of my philosophy. Having entered my ninetieth year it is high time for that. ....

“In this Issue of Philosophy Pathways my aim was to write three condensed accounts of three aspects of my work which together give a fairly comprehensive summary of my philosophy.

“The first paper, ‘Philosophy as Poetry’, presents an uncommon conception of the nature of philosophical thinking, at any rate as far as what I would call ‘philosophy proper’ is concerned.

“The second paper, ‘Becoming as Creativity’, introduces the Principle of Creativity as an answer both to the problem of becoming – usually buried under the quandaries and puzzles of ‘causation’ – and to the riddle of Free Will.

“The third paper, ‘Eternity and Freedom’, unites axiology and ontology in an original conception of Eternity. Only in Plato and Spinoza are axiology and ontology so closely knit together.”

The following is a revised and somewhat augmented version of the three pieces.

## I.

### PHILOSOPHY AS POETRY

There is no agreed answer to the question: What is philosophy? If we try to apply Wittgenstein’s “the meaning is the use” to philosophy we get nowhere. There are as many ‘uses’ of the term as there are philosophers or at least as there are schools of philosophy. Wittgenstein’s notion of “family resemblances” may be more helpful, though in the case of philosophy the family members are an odd discordant bunch especially if we take in the youngest generation. Let us try the historical approach, though here too we have more diversity than affinity. Even if we confine ourselves in time to the flicker between the sixth and the fourth centuries BC and in space to that tiny speck in the north-eastern Mediterranean, who would say that Thales and Xenophanes, or Heraclitus and Anaxagoras, or Empedocles and Socrates represent a homogeneous genre of thinking? What I propose therefore is to separate a line of thought that began and apparently ended with two unique figures: Socrates and Plato — to isolate that line of thought and give it a distinctive name. For want of anything better I call it ‘philosophy proper’ without denying the other family members the right to the proud family name of Philosophy. [See “Philosophy as Prophecy” in *The Sphinx and the Phoenix*, download: <https://archive.org/details/THESPHINXANDTHEPHOENIX> and “Two Kinds of Metaphysics” in *Plato’s Universe of Discourse*, download: <https://archive.org/details/PlatosUniverseOfDiscourse> ]

At his trial Socrates declares it to be his life-mission to live philosophizing and examining himself and others (*Apology* 28e) and these were for him not two things but one: to philosophize is to probe one’s beliefs, one’s values, one’s purpose in life. An unexamined life, he proclaims, is not a life for a human being

(38a). This belief was well-grounded in his philosophical thought. For the greatest good, the only proper good for a human being, is to have a healthy soul, and the wholesomeness of the soul consists just in being clear about this insight: that nothing is ultimately good but what prospers the wellbeing of the soul and nothing is truly evil but what harms the soul. Thus all good, all understanding, all wisdom resides in the wholesomeness of our inner reality, our *psuchê* (soul) — variously designated by *nous*, *phronêsis*, *sophia*, or by the unfortunate blanket term *epistêmê*. All else can only be relatively and conditionally good when it conduces to that one ultimate good.

And as all things in the external world are in themselves as nothing to our true good, so all knowledge of the outer natural world is essentially irrelevant to what is ultimately real and to the one insight on which our true good depends. *This is the basis of the radical distinction that Socrates draws in the Phaedo* (95e-102a) between the knowledge that comes from investigation into the things outside us (*en tois ergois*) and the understanding that comes from investigation into the ideas in the mind (*en tois logois*).

Plato emphasized and highlighted this view. All things in the natural world have only a mock ‘reality’. When the mind investigates what we have come to call the phenomenal world, making use of the body – or as we would now say, making use of empirical data – in considering anything, it is dragged by the body into the changeable and is then led into error and is confused and dizzied and is drunken (*Phaedo* 79c). In modern parlance: the empirical investigation of the natural world is confined to the phenomenal. But when the mind “all by itself reflects, it moves into that which is pure, always is, ... remains with that always, ... and then it rests from wandering, and in the company of that, is constant, being in communion with such; and it is this state that is called *phronêsis*” (*Phaedo* 79d). As all good and all understanding reside for Socrates in the soul (mind) so for Plato all reality, all that is really real, is nowhere to be beheld but in our own inner reality. So in the *Republic* the philosophical quest is summed up in the following words:

“Would we not be making a reasonable defence [of philosophy] when we say that a true philosophical nature aspires to what IS, does not tarry by the many particulars that are thought to be, but goes forth with no blunting and no slackening of her desire, until she grasps the essence of every reality by

that in her soul to which it is becoming – namely, what is akin – to grasp that, approaching and mingling with what has true being, gives birth to reason and reality; enjoys knowledge and true life and is nourished, and then has relief of her birth pangs, but not before then?” (490a-b.)

As all understanding for Socrates comes from probing our mind so for Plato all insight into reality comes from communion with our inner reality. That inner reality, which is the only reality and all the reality we are vouchsafed to approach, is represented in the *Republic* by the Form of the Good. But the Form of the Good is beyond being and beyond understanding. We can commune with it in philosophical insight, in poetic and artistic creativity, in mystic experience, but it cannot be conveyed in any determinate formulation of thought or words. It can only be intimated in conceptual myths, in poetic visions, in the creations of artistic genius.

In all of this there is no inferential reasoning, no argumentation in the narrower sense of the term, but oracular proclamation. In all genuine philosophy rationalistic reasoning and argumentation can have only an ancillary role for the purposes of exposition and elucidation. Look at Schopenhauer’s *World as Will and Idea*; look at Whitehead’s *Process and Reality* (to pick up two examples that come to mind), you will find no pretence of inferential reasoning or logical proof. A philosopher’s profoundest insights are not arrived at by reasoning; they are creative notions that render aspects of living experience intelligible. What is most precious and of lasting value in Plato’s *Phaedo*? The notion of the philosophical life, the notion of the divinity of the soul, the notion that the creations of the mind are the source of all intelligibility and all understanding: all the elaborate arguments for immortality are confessedly inconclusive (107b).

Thus what I call philosophy proper is poetry oracularly proclaiming the philosopher’s insight into the one reality of which we have immediate cognizance, our own inner reality. When Socrates in the *Phaedo* says that philosophical is the greatest music, he is speaking prophetically (61a).

Hence I gave my latest book, *Creative Eternity*, the subtitle “a metaphysical myth” and explained in the first chapter why it had to be a myth. [Download: <https://archive.org/details/CreativeEternityAMetaphysicalMyth> ]

## II.

### BECOMING AS CREATIVITY

What makes a thing bring about another thing different from itself? What sense is there in saying that what has become comes from what was before? We are so immersed in change that our sense of wonder is blunted and we come to take the becoming of one thing out of another as the most natural of things. Yet reflection should make it plain that for one thing to produce or to become another thing different from itself is truly mystifying. To describe in minutest detail the stages through which the sprout passes in coming out of the seed only gives us the delusion of understanding but the mystery remains unfathomable; and such is all so-called scientific explanation. Indeed we cannot find a single instance of one particular thing bringing about another: we always have a combination of circumstances or elements in the first place, but that does not make things any better. So in the case of the sprout to bring in the role of the soil and moisture and sunlight does not make the mystery less mysterious. May my sense of wonder and my puzzlement at the budding of a new leaf never wane!

The term ‘cause’ is an empty word, a veil to hide our ignorance. Newton named the mysterious thing behind one body attracting or being attracted by another gravitation but he confessed he had no idea what that might be. In all the so-called explanations provided by science for natural happenings we have a description of contributing elements or an account or successive stages. Such knowledge of what goes on in the coming about of any given state of affairs is practically useful. That is the stuff of all of our empirical science. It enables us to anticipate, to control, to manipulate, natural processes. But we deceive ourselves when we think it explains anything. All we know, as Hume insisted, is that one thing follows another.

Bertrand Russell found that we can do without the notion of cause; all we need are the laws of nature (“On the Notion of Cause, with Applications to the

Free-Will Problem”). But the laws of nature are patterns we formulate, descriptive of natural processes, and luckily find them fitting those natural processes to a satisfactory degree of accuracy. To speak of ‘Laws of Nature’ as explaining – or worse still, as causing or governing – the goings on in nature is utter folly, though readily condoned by eminently brilliant scientists and philosophers. (They are not stupid; they simply do not have the philosophical urge to understand; instead they have the practical drive to control and manipulate the natural process.)

Wittgenstein rightly said: “The whole modern conception of the world is founded on the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena” (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.371, tr. Pears and McGuinness).

In the *Phaedo* Socrates presents the fundamental insight that it is by the ideas created by the mind that a thing has meaning for us, becomes what it is for us: it is by the idea of Beauty that we find anything beautifully (95e-102a). [See Chapter Five, “The Meaning of the *Phaedo*” in, *Plato: An Inyerpretation*, download: <https://archive.org/details/PlatoAnInterpretation> ]. Plato (in what is referred to as the final argument for immortality) derives from this a ‘method of explanation’: a thing becomes hot when it is imbued with the form of heat. I see this as one of Plato’s whimsical excursions into theorizing and in any case this is not how a thing comes to be but how it becomes intelligible to us in itself.

Aristotle busied himself with the problem of causation and came up with not one but four ‘causes’ for a thing, none of which is a cause in any satisfactory sense. The formal cause is just the shadow of the Socratic-Platonic form. The material cause is what we start with, what the thing was before it became what it has become. The final cause, in the case of man-made things, is the end or purpose of the activity that brings the thing about. The efficient cause, again in the case of man-made things, is the maker, and it is the model after which the God of monotheistic theology is fashioned. Aristotle’s doctrine of four causes is a good exercise in analysis but it explains nothing.

The dialectical thesis-antithesis-synthesis commonly attributed to Hegel takes the scientific idea of a natural law to its apex: it is a formal abstract pattern, or rather a paradigm, of natural laws, that luckily fits many happenings. It may be a good rule for guiding our analyses of happenings, but it explains nothing and definitely, in itself, brings about nothing.

Thus all the wrestlings of thinkers with the problem of how things come about have, or should have, one result: to awaken our wonder and heighten our awareness that becoming – the playful metamorphosis of all things, going all around us all the time – is an ultimate riddle. And the key to the riddle is within us. The only intelligible becoming of which we have immediate cognizance is the spontaneous becoming of our thoughts and deeds. I am writing these lines; nothing causes my thoughts or the words in which I clothe my thoughts; my thoughts and my words creatively outflow from my inner being. When the mind communes with its inner reality, Plato says, it gives birth to reason and reality (*Republic* 490a-b). My simplest acts burst out of my total being as a plant sprouts out of the seed; my deepest feelings gush out from my innermost reality. All the analyses of physiologists and neurologists are external descriptions that explain nothing. Shelley cannot find any explanation for the singing of the Skylark but that the happy bird pours its “full heart / In profuse strains of unpremeditated art”. And why should not the skylark be happy? What do we know of the innermost state of things? Except that we dress our ignorance in the garb of science.

The only way I can find any becoming intelligible is to see all being and all becoming as creative. All things, all deeds, all states of being have antecedents; the antecedent does not cause the consequent but creatively flowers in the consequent. Modern philosophers have needlessly made a problem of free will. They readily belie their immediate awareness of their free action because it is thought to be incompatible with the fiction of causal determinism. Not only do they overlook the consideration that ‘laws of nature’ do not cause or explain natural processes, but they pay no regard to the consideration that all ‘laws of nature’ are abstract approximations. How do we know that the most common phenomenal occurrence, good-naturedly complying with our predictions and expectations, does not actually come with a difference, just as a singer, singing to the score, cannot but sing differently every time if only because the singer’s larynx and whole body never ceases changing from moment to moment? How can the most accurate calculation of the Earth’s revolution around the sun not be an approximation when the sun, the earth, and all the stuff in between, never cease to change? Surely the sun this hour is not what it was earlier this morning and the Earth today has suffered change since yesterday; and this is not philosophy but the strictest of science. Nature never does the same thing twice without some delicate modulation, even if that escapes

our gross senses and our gross instruments. Mathematics and logic have a show of absolute certainty simply because they are and only so longas they are pure form without content. By themselves, as Wittgenstein found out, they say nothing. Of all modern scientists, Einstein was the one who saw this clearly and expressed it lucidly: “As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain, as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality”, he said.

The pseudo-problem of ‘free will’ has been needlessly complicated by confusing free will with freedom of choice. Choice and deliberation are, strictly, not instances of freedom but of constraint. It is in so far as we are imperfect and subject to external influences that we have to deliberate and to make choices which are always conditioned by antecedents. We are truly free in spontaneous moral and creative activity. But not only on that exalted level do we act freely. The humblest of our daily motions are free: I take a sip of coffee because I will it; I get up and walk to the window because I will it. Socrates explains that he remains in prison to face death not because his bones and joints and sinews necessitate it but because he will be true to his convictions (*Phaedo* 98c-e). The word ‘will’ itself is misleading when we think of will as a faculty. The materialist Hobbes knew better than the rationalists and idealists: there is no Will; there is only willing (*Leviathan*, Part I., chap.VI); the act is fully spontaneous. But the materialists are wrong when they think the willing is produced by what can be subjected to objective observation whatever that might be. The willing wells up from nowhere, or rather from the non-existent personality (the ‘transcendent’ reality of the person). (For the seemingly occult notion of ‘non-existent reality’ see under “Eternity and Freedom” below.) When we act freely it is our whole being that outflows freely in the act. A little baby’s happy giggle is the free outflow of the baby’s wellbeing. Again when scientists speak of glands and chemical processes and neural what not, I say: Thank you, that is very interesting; but if you think that causes or explains the happy giggle you are misusing the term ‘explain’.

In the *Timaeus* Plato mythically says that the *demiourgos* made the world because, being good, he wanted to propagate his goodness. In the *Republic* the Form of the Good is the source of all life, all being, all understanding. That is the only intelligible view of the source of the world. Ultimate Reality being intelligent and good outflows creatively – or as Plotinus would put it, emanates – in the universe of being and becoming and it is the ultimate creativity of Reality that

creatively sustains and creatively renews everything and is the only intelligible ground for all being and all becoming.

### III.

## ETERMITY AND FREEDOM

The conceptual intellect is the glory and the doom of humankind. It is in virtue of our conceptual thought that we have our special character, distinguishing us from all other animals, and it is in all probability, as it now seems, by this same intellect and our vaunted reasoning powers that the human species will be led to its final annihilation. So conceptual intellection is the peculiar property of human beings but it is not what is best or what is most valuable in them. There is in us a deeper, purer, intelligence — in our body, in the tranquility of serene solitude, in moments when we are struck with awe and wonder, in the gasp we eject at the sight of beauty, in the gush of love when soul opens to soul, in the flow of tenderness towards a helpless creature, in the happy giggle of a baby, in the exuberance of poetic creativity — in all of that there is a deeper, purer intelligence, a state of pure internal joyful illumination, and I find that deep, pure, intelligence in the warbling of the bird and in the dance of the butterfly. When Shelley addresses the Skylark saying, “Teach me half the gladness / That thy brain must know”, he is addressing the fount of Life at the heart of all Being.

From the beginning of human existence the best individuals at their best moments — when one all by oneself is one with the whole of Nature — yearned for communion with the intelligence in the All and aspired for union with the All. The sages, the mystics, the inspired poets, found that communion with the All within themselves, in their inmost reality. “I searched myself”, says Heraclitus. The best philosophy seeks to rouse our awareness of that fount of intelligence in us and in the whole of reality. Thus the profoundest thinkers found all things in the One and found the One in all things.

Heraclitus found one Logos in all things and found all reality and all understanding in the hidden depths of the unfathomable soul.

Socrates sought the good and found the good in understanding; yet that understanding is understanding of no other thing than the good; and in the end the good is found to be no other than the wholesomeness of the soul, the integrity of that inner reality of ours that is fostered by doing what is right and is harmed by doing what is wrong. (This is the gist of the Socratic elenchus, plainly spelled out in the elenctic discourses of Socrates which Aristotle misled us into seeing as searching for definitions.)

Some twenty-two centuries later we find Spinoza saying: “We know nothing to be certainly good ... save what is truly conducive to understanding ...” (*Ethics*, IV. XXVII). Spinoza goes on to say: “The greatest good of the mind is the knowledge of God, and the greatest virtue of the mind is to know God” (IV. XXVIII). And we should note that for Spinoza God is the one Substance, the one all-embracing Reality, “that which is in itself and is conceived through itself” (First Part, Definitions, III). Kant sums it all up in saying that nothing is absolutely good except a good will.

For Plato only what is wholly real is wholly intelligible (*Republic* 477a) and only one who sees things as a whole is a philosopher (*Republic* 537c). And the wholly real and wholly intelligible is represented by Plato as the Form of the Good, which is yet beyond being and beyond understanding. — How all these seemingly various views coalesce will, I hope, be clear from what follows.

When we probe deep enough we find that the questions: ‘What is real?’, ‘What is ultimate reality?’, ‘What is the good?’, ‘How do we know reality?’, are not so many questions but are aspects of one question, various manifestations of the one mystery that haunts all reflective minds. Multitudinous faltering answers have been and are being offered, every one good in its way but, as determinate theories or supposedly definitive answers, they all crumble under the weight of their own intrinsic contradictoriness. In the end the mind can only find rest in that insight shared by poets and mystics and expressed by the Hindu wisdom in the words of the Upanishads: “Thou Art That”. For in the end we find that our restless,

irking, questioning Intelligence is itself all the reality, all the understanding, all the good we know or can ever know.

That inner intelligence, that inner reality of ours, is not a substance; it is nowhere; it is simply our inwardness, our subjectivity. It is what Kant referred to as the transcendental unity of apperception and laboured in vain to give an account of. We may call it the principle of our unity, of our wholeness, of our creativity. It cannot be located, cannot be ‘observed’, because it is not in the nature of inwardness to be objectified; it can only be beheld in the immediacy of living intelligent spontaneity. It is pure creativity, an instance of the intelligent creativity that is the ungrounded ground of all that is. I harp on this because the notion of the real that does not exist and cannot exist because it is real — this notion is novel and is not easy to grasp since it flies in the face of common thought and common language.

Thus the one reality we know, that is our own inner reality, cannot be placed or found anywhere in space or time because, being the Unconditioned *par excellence*, it cannot be a thing conditioned by space or time or constrained in a determinate formulation of thought or language. Our inner reality, our model for all reality and for ultimate Reality, is subjectivity, not passive subjectivity but burning, effulgent, creative, intelligent subjectivity, and like Plato’s Form of the Good, beyond all existence and all determinate knowledge.

At our best, when we are happiest and most blessed, when we are truly our true selves, we are givers and creators. In spontaneous good deeds, in poetic and artistic creation, we are outflowing intelligence, outflowing virtue, outflowing love. Only then do we have true being transcending the ephemerality of our bodied being: only in the spontaneity of love and in poetic and artistic creativity do we have true being and intelligence and goodness. Only then are we true to the intelligence that is our inner reality and is part of the intelligent creativity of the All — that Power “Which wields the world with never-wearied love, / Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above” (Shelley, *Adonais*).

What most strikes a reflective mind contemplating the natural world is its mutability and fugitiveness. Not only do all living things die and come to dust but in the long view the massive mountains have no more permanence or stability than

the rainbow; the stars and galaxies in the height of their splendour are dying, constantly burning themselves out. All that is in this world of change is and is not, for to exist, to be a particular this, a particular what, is to be grounded in non-being. It is a mockery to call it real. Thus the Hindu sages saw the world as *maya*. To exist is to be constrained by Where and When, to be There and Then, to be determined by and dependent on all that the particular existent is not. Thus Existence is grounded in imperfection; its law is transience. (If I remember correctly, this is the gist of the first Part of Bradley's *Appearance and Reality*.) Hence the universal flux. Nothing that exists lasts, to exist is to be evanescent. "Fire lives the death of earth and *aér* lives the death of fire, water lives the death of *aér*, earth that of water." (Heraclitus, tr. Richard D. McKirahan and Patricia Curd.) Existence is the original sin that brings death in its wake. Plato never wearied of emphasizing the unreality of all things in the natural world.

By contrast what is real has been conceived as permanent, constant, and unchanging, such as the One of Parmenides. Even Plato, for a time, in theory, voiced this error, until he saw its incompatibility with his profounder insight into Reality as creative, as procreation in beauty (*Symposium*). In the *Republic* the Form of the Good, while beyond being and beyond understanding, brings forth all being, all life, all understanding. In the *Sophist*, first we have the crucial statement that things that are, are no other thing than activity, *ta onta hôs estin ouk allo ti plên dunamis* (247e), and then, arguing against the 'Friends of the Forms' who took his poetic flights about the immutability of the Forms too literally and narrowly, he says: "But tell me, in heaven's name: are we really to be so easily convinced that change, life, soul, understanding have no place in that which is perfectly real — that it has neither life nor thought, but stands immutable in solemn aloofness, devoid of intelligence?" (248e-249a, tr. Cornford.) In the *Timaeus* Plato says that the maker of the universe made it because, being good, he wished all things to share in his goodness (29d-e). All of this does not signify any reversal or change in Plato's fundamental outlook. I maintain that the creativity of all that is real is of the essence of Plato's thought, but this is not the place to argue that out.

All perfection, all goodness, all understanding, is creative and the ultimately real is pure creativity. Ultimate Reality is not an entity, not a This, not a What, for all determinate actuality is necessarily transient since it is grounded in non-being. Reality is the negation of thingness as it is the negation of existence. What is fully

real does not exist but outflows in transient existents. If we name Reality God, it is blasphemy to say that God exists. Ultimate Reality is pure Act, pure Creativity: it is not an agent that is active, not a god that is creative, but sheer creativity. I ordinarily say that ultimate Reality is creative intelligence but find fault with that expression; it is rather intelligent creativity. The perfection of Being is creativity *sans* a creator and the perfection of Goodness is the same creativity *sans* a creator. I name it Creative Eternity.

Eternity is not extended time or limitless time; it is the negation of temporality as it is the negation of all actuality. Eternity is Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva all in one: it is the eternal Act, it is Love, it is the Form of the Good that, being beyond all being and beyond all understanding, brings forth all evanescent being and goodness and beauty and intelligence.

Thus, in attempting to comprehend the mysteries of Being, of Life, of Goodness, of Understanding, we end up with the mystery of mysteries that we yet come face to face with in the mystery of our own inner reality that is pure intelligent creativity.

We end where we began, our Omega is proclaimed in our Alpha, and I can say with Parmenides “For me, it is indifferent from where I am to begin: for that is where I will arrive back again.”

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